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ABSTRACT

The idea is widely supported that abuse is far more common among acquaintances than among strangers and is most common within the family. The dating relationship is another intimate relationship in which abuse occurs. In this study the association between abuse in the family of origin and sexual abuse in dating was analyzed by determining the predictive power of family abuse for four dependent variables: sexual victimization in dating for men and for women and sexual coercion in dating for men and for women. Subjects were 60 female and 51 male undergraduate students. Subjects responded to the Dating Experiences Questionnaire which consisted of closed-end questions in three sections: background information; abuse in the family of origin; and experience with sexual victimization and use of sexual coercion in dating. Multiple linear regression analysis was used to test the association between family abuse and three of the four dependent variables. Family abuse was found to be significantly predictive of sexual victimization in dating for women. Family abuse was more predictive of sexual victimization than of sexual coercion in dating in this study. While most studies have tended to support the cycle of abuse hypothesis in general, the specific aspects of abuse that are typical need further examination. (Contains 50 references.) (Author/ABL)

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THE PREDICTIVE POWER OF ABUSE IN THE FAMILY OF ORIGIN FOR SEXUAL ABUSE IN DATING

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Abstract

The association between abuse in the family of origin and sexual abuse in dating was analyzed by determining the predictive power of family abuse for four dependent variables: sexual victimization in dating for men and for women, the sexual coercion in dating for men and for women. The sample consisted of 60 female and 51 male undergraduate university students. An instrument, labelled the Dating Experience Questionnaire, was compiled for this study. Multiple linear regression analysis was used to test the association between family abuse and three of the four dependent variables. Family abuse was found to be significantly predictive of sexual victimization in dating for women.

The Predictive Power of Abuse in the Family of Origin For Sexual Abuse in Dating

It is widely supported that abuse is far more common among acquaintances than among strangers and is most common within the family. "People are more likely to be hit, beaten up, physically injured, or even killed in their own home by another family member than anywhere else, and by anyone else, in our society" (Gelles, 1979, p. 11). According to the two national American studies of family violence (Straus & Gelles, 1988), the best estimates of family abuse are: (a) 10% of wives are abused by their husbands, (b) 28% of married couples use at least mild forms of physical aggression (e.g., slaps and shoves) against one another, (c) 73% of children experience minor forms of physical punishment (e.g., slaps and spankings) from their parents, and (d) 4% are severely abused (e.g., beaten up). Badgley et al. (1954) reported that 6% of children are sexually abused within their families.

The dating relationship is another intimate relationship in which abuse occurs. Many studies (e.g., Garrett-Gooding & Senter, 1987; Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987; Koss & Oros, 1982; Miller & Marshall, 1987; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987; Peterson & Franzese, 1987; Sandberg, Jackson, & Petretic-Jackson, 1987) have established that sexual abuse in dating is the most common type of dating abuse. As many as 74% of women and 48% of men experience some form of sexual coercion in dating

(Sandberg, Jackson, & Petretic-Jackson, 1987); and 25% of women are victims of rape or attempted rape, 57% of which occur on dates (Warshaw, 1988).

However, few studies have explored variables that might be related to sexual abuse in dating. Burkhart and Stanton (1988) concluded from a review of the literature on courtship sexual abuse that research must move beyond examining prevalence and investigate "hypothesized determinants of sexual aggression among acquaintances" (p. 61). The first step in determining a cause-effect relationship is to identify a variable that is associated with sexual abuse in dating. The current study was such a first step. It tested the hypothesis that abuse in the family of origin is associated with sexual abuse in dating.

This hypothesis was based on social learning theory. In the cycle of abuse paradigm, violence is learned through modeling; and those who encounter abuse in childhood, particularly in the family of origin, are more likely to sustain or perpetrate abuse in adulthood (Bandura, 1973).

Consistent with the cycle of abuse hypothesis, numerous researchers of abuse in the family (Browne & Finkelhor, 1988; Feshback, 1979; Finkelhor, 1986, 1988; Freeman, 1979; Gelles, 1979, 1985; Gelles & Cornell, 1985; Johnston, 1988; Kaufman & Zigler, 1987; Kalmuss, 1984; Lystad, 1979; MacLeod, 1987; Roscoe & Benaske, 1985; Shirk, 1988; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980; Stacey & Shupe, 1983; Strean, 1988; Ulbrich & Huber, 1981; Wyatt & Powell, 1988) have

suggested that early abuse is associated with abuse in adulthood. As Finkelhor (1988) stated, "Perhaps the most sinister aspect of family violence is its self-perpetuating character. Victims of family violence seem to be at higher risk to become both future victims and future perpetrators" (p. 26).

Observing parental violence, experiencing abuse from one's parents, and experiencing sexual abuse in childhood might all be related to abuse in adult relationships.

For instance, positive relationships between observing one's parents fighting and/or experiencing child abuse and perpetrating or sustaining spouse abuse were reported by a number of researchers (e.g., Gelles, 1979; Johnston, 1988; Kalmuss, 1984; MacLeod, 1987; Roscoe & Benaske, 1985; Stacey & Shupe, 1983; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). There were also some significant associations between physical abuse in the family of origin and physical abuse in dating according to the findings of other studies (e.g., Bernard & Bernard, 1983; Gwartney-Gibbs, Stoekard, & Bohmer, 1987; Johnston, 1988; Koss, 1985; Murphy, 1988; Sigelman, Berry, & Wiles, 1984). Furthermore, significant relationships between sexual abuse in childhood and sexual abuse in adulthood were reported by various researchers (Koss & Dinero, 1989; Lundberg-Love & Geffner, 1989; Miller & Marshall, 1987; McShane, 1988; Peterson & Franzese, 1987; Petrovich & Templer, 1984; Silbert & Pines, 1983).

Burke, Stets, and Pirog-Good (1988) explored the relationship between physical abuse in the family of origin and sexual abuse in dating. They reported a significant association between those two variables. Koss and Dinero (1990) and Miller and Marshall (1987) examined all three types of abuse in the family and both studies found all to be significantly predictive of sexually coercive behavior in dating by men.

All three types of abuse in the family of origin, child abuse, adult-to-adult abuse, and child sexual abuse, were examined in the present study. In addition, Gelles' (1979) findings prompted the study of child abuse within two age ranges in childhood: under age 10 and between ages 10 and 17. Gelles found that preschoolers and children under 10 years of age were more likely to receive minor physical punishment from their parents than children over 9 years old.

Previous research seemed to justify further study of the cycle of abuse theory. It lead to the more specific hypothesis that abuse in the family of origin is significantly predictive of sexual abuse in dating.

Men and women in this study were examined as both perpetrators and victims of sexual abuse in dating. Only very recently have studies (Burke, Stets, & Pirog-Good, 1988; Muehlenhard & Cook, 1988; Sandberg, Jackson, & Petretic-Jackson, 1987; Struckman-Johnson, 1988) begun to examine and, subsequently, to find, sexually coercive

females and victimized males. The existence of some sexual abuse in homosexual relationships also demonstrated that sexual coercion in intimate relationships in not strictly a male-against-female phenomenon (Lobel, 1986; Waterman, Dawson, & Bologna, 1989).

Burke, Stets, and Pirog-Good (1988) suggested that researchers of sexual abuse in dating reconsider the male oriented theories of the past which only considered males as abusers and females as victims. Struckman-Johnson (1988) concluded from her study of forced sex on dates that "Investigators conducting general prevalence surveys of coercive sexual behavior should assess male and female victimization and perpetration rates" (p. 239).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the predictive power of abuse in the family of origin for sexual abuse in dating. The independent variable, abuse in the family of origin, referred to 25 types of abuse in the family. These individual abuses were classified under four general family abuse categories. The first was child abuse under age 10: receiving physical punishment from an adult in the family of origin when the subject was under 10 years old. The second type was child abuse between ages 10 and 17: receiving such punishment when the subject was over age 9. Adult-to-adult abuse was the third classification of abuse. It occurred when subjects had observed adults in their families physically fighting. Child sexual abuse,

sexual experiences with a member of the family of origin, was the final type of family abuse studied.

The first three physical punishment categories each consisted of six items resulting in 18 individual types of physical abuse in the family. These six items were six of the violence acts measured by the Conflict Tactics Scales (Straus, 1979): (a) slapping or spanking; (b) pushing, grabbing, or shoving; (c) hitting with something; (d) throwing something; (e) kicking, biting, or punching; and (f) beating up.

An adult in the family referred to any adult (over the age of 18) living with the student at the time, including a parent, step-parent, foster-parent, parent's live-in lover, nanny, older sibling, or grandparent.

The other seven family abuse items were sexual experiences with a member of the subject's family of origin. Those seven sexual experiences of progressive severity, as suggested by Finkelhor (1979), were: (a) the offender kissed and hugged the subject in a sexual way, (b) the offender showed his/her sex organs to the subject, (c) the subject showed his/her sex organs to the offender, (d) the offender fondled the subject in a sexual way, (e) the offender touched or stroked the subject's sex organs, (f) the subject touched or stroked the offender's sex organs, and (g) the offender attempted or had sexual intercourse with the subject.

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The dependent variable, sexual abuse in dating, referred to three different types of pressure to take part in sexual activity on a date: verbal (anything said for the express purpose of gaining sexual activity), physical (doing the sexual activity even after the dating partner has objected), and forceful (threatening or using physical force to gain sexual activity). Sexual activity included sex play (kissing and fondling) and sexual intercourse (vaginal, anal, or oral intercourse). Using such pressure against a dating partner was termed sexual coercion and experiencing such pressure from a dating partner was called sexual victimization.

Methods

Subjects

The present sample consisted of 60 female and 51 male undergraduate students attending summer courses in the faculty of arts at a western university in Canada. Based on their self-reports, the majority of subjects had completed at least two years of university (88%), had attended university during the past year (91%), were middle class (81%), and were heterosexual (90%).

Instrument

A self-report instrument, labelled the Dating Experiences Questionnaire, was compiled for this study. It consisted of closed-ended question in three sections. The first sought background information. Experience with abuse in the family of origin was requested in the second section.

It used items from the Conflict Tactics Scales (Straus, 1979). The third section, based on the Sexual Experiences Survey (Koss & Gidycz, 1985), requested information on experience with sexual victimization and use of sexual coercion in dating.

Procedure for Data Collection

The procedures used in the present study followed closely with those procedures used in the National Survey of Inter-Gender Relationships, as outlined be Koss (1988). In the summer of 1990, 13 professors of undergraduate courses in the Faculty of Arts were asked to allow their students to participate, of which seven agreed. The senior researcher administered the questionnaires and 100% of the students in the seven classes participated. For various reasons 24 of the questionnaires were not usable.

Data Analysis

The predictive power of abuse in the family of origin for sexual abuse in dating was determined by using multiple linear regression analyses. The dependent variable, sexual abuse in dating, was subdivided into sexual victimization and sexual coercion, and men and women were examined separately. That variable division resulted in four substudies: (a) sexual victimization in dating for women, (b) sexual victimization in dating for men, (c) sexual coercion in dating for women, and (d) sexual coercion in dating for men.

In each of the substudies, exploratory analyses were first performed on one set of data (the exploratory sample), an hypothesis was then formulated, and it was tested on an independent set of data (the final sample). Specifically, for each substudy a variation on the Botward technique of exploratory analysis was used on the exploratory sample to search for a probable best set of family abuse predictors of sexual abuse in dating. That combination of items in a set became the basis for stating the null hypothesis. This was then tested by using standard linear regression analysis on the final sample to determine significance and predictive power. The assumption was that, if the combination of items representing abuse in the family of origin had significant predictive power for future sexual abuse in dating, then the null hypothesis would be rejected.

Results

The results of the four substudies are reported in this section.

Family Abuse and Sexual Victimization for Women

A set of six items that was most likely to predict sexual victimization in dating for women was identified through exploratory analysis: (a) being pushed, grabbed, or shoved before age 10; (b) being beat up between ages 10 and 17; observing an adult in the family (c) slap another adult, (d) hit another adult with something, and (e) throw something at another adult; and (f) being kissed and hugged in a sexual way. The r^2 was .726 ($F=6.618$; $df=6, 15$;

p=.001). This r^2 was, of course, completely invalid as a test of any hypothesis as it involves massive optimization on chance. However, it suggested the likely best set of items to be used in a test of an hypothesis on an independent sample.

The null hypothesis for the women in the present study, then, was that this combination of six items for family abuse was independent of the variable, sexual victimization in dating. This hypothesis was tested on the final sample of women using linear regression analysis. The six-item set was significantly predictive of sexual victimization in dating for the women in the final sample (r^2= .424, F=3.686; df=6, 30; p=.007). The null hypothesis was rejected.

Family Abuse and Sexual Victimization for Men

Exploratory analysis suggested an equation of seven items that would best predict sexual victimization in dating for men. The r^2 of these items was .777 (F=4.977; df=7, 10; p=.012). Again, this r^2 was not a valid test of any hypothesis, but it did suggest which items would be most worthwhile to test on the final sample.

The null hypothesis for men, then, was that the combination of seven types of abuse in the family of origin (being pushed, grabbed, or shoved, having something thrown at you, and being kicked, bit , or punched before age 10; being slapped or spanked, and being pushed, grabbed, or shoved between ages 10 and 17; and observing an adult slap another and beat up another adult) was independent of sexual

victimization in dating. A multiple regression analysis was performed on the final sample of men using these seven items. The resulting r^2 was .357 (F=1.985; df=7, 25; p=.098). Some association might be inferred, but caution should be exercised in rejecting the null hypothesis.

Family Abuse and Sexual Coercion in Dating for Women

Only five sexually coercive women identified themselves in this study: Thus, multiple linear regression analyses could not be performed with that dependent variable. One of the coercive women did not report her family abuse history. Of the other four, all reported some type of family abuse: three reported physical abuse after age 10, one recounted observing her parents fighting, and three recorded experiencing child sexual abuse in the family.

Family Abuse and Sexual Coercion in Dating for Men

Exploratory analysis identified a set of four items which best predicted sexual coercion in dating for the men in the exploratory sample. Three of those items were types of child abuse that took place between the ages of 10 and 17, namely being slapped or spanked; being pushed, grabbed, or shoved; and being beaten up. Observing an adult in the family slap another adult in the family was the fourth item. For the exploratory sample, these four items yielded and r^2 of .679 (F=6.860; df=4, 13; p=.003). Again, the r^2 was not a valid test of any hypothesis but simply suggested the combination of items that was most likely to be associated with sexual coercion in dating for men.

The final null hypothesis tested in this study was that this combination of four family abuse items was independent of sexual coercion in dating for men. Multiple linear regression analysis was performed. The resulting r^2 of .123 ($F=.979$; $df=4, 28$; $p=.435$) was not significant and the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

Conclusions

Abuse in the family of origin would seem to have predictive power for sexual abuse in dating according to this study: There was a significant association between family abuse and sexual abuse in dating. This association was most apparent for women. No significant association was found in the present study between family abuse and sexual coercion in dating for men, although the relationship between family abuse and sexual victimization in dating neared significance for men.

The finding that family abuse predicts sexual victimization in dating for women, but less so for men, contradicts previous findings on spouse abuse (MacLeod, 1987; Stacey & Shupe, 1983; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980) and on dating violence (Bernard & Bernard, 1983; Gwartney-Gibbs, Stockard, & Bohmer, 1987). They had concluded from their findings that the association between family abuse and physical abuse in intimate adult relationships was stronger for men than for women.

Family abuse was more predictive of sexual victimization than of sexual coercion in dating in the

present study. Burke, Stets, and Pirog-Good (1988) made the same conclusion, but Koss and Dinero (1990) and Miller and Marshall (1987) reported the opposite to be true.

While most studies have tended to support the cycle of abuse hypothesis in general, the specific aspects of abuse that are cyclical need further examination. How the relationship between family abuse and sexual abuse in dating (a) differs for men and women and (b) differs for those who sustain and those who inflict sexual abuse in dating should be the targets of future research.

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